

4 February 2026

Nauseated by nine o'clock again, I can't get the slightest forward motion to even begin to work on anything. For weeks--maybe eight of them, an unforgivable section of a year--it's been external imposition of non-activity, and now it is the utter stasis, quite familiar to me, in which every idea becomes embittered in the span between when I begin to cobble it together and when I lift a finger to work it out, and I never move. Last Friday, my last open day for painting, I gave myself a different task, because I felt deeply and consciously that if I strung together more than three or four days like last Wednesday I might never paint again. So on this gift of a day off work I set out to take a long walk up into the sunny hill and listen to everything I wrote in the last two or three months to clear my eyes. For a stretch that included neither the start nor the end I pulled together my (purely habitual, that is to say, unearned, like the product of caffeine) semi-usual enthusiasm to make the interlinear-exegetical notes that I pasted at the end of last month's note document. Then I became once again locked into the stasis which the walk was supposed to be a decisive action against, feeling that even with these clearest eyes I can scrape together, still nothing I could make seems like it might eventually be good or worth making. So last Friday was the second of three or four days like last Wednesday, and the worst yet, even if the deliberate effectuation of exhaustion forestalled the red and bruised left arm and right hand.

I can't see any good reason to, but I still feel like noting the things which seemed--relatively, or for relatively more seconds, or relatively frequently--palatable. In retrospect they seem to have in common that they all skirt painting proper. They may be compromised by this, vampirically deriving their charge or *raison d'être* from a tradition whose resources they fail to make good upon, coming off consummately empty for conjuring painting's stakes as they (even in the same gesture) fail right there where they site themselves.

Duck fat

The stamp, or anything sigillographic

Anything alchemical

Strau, mainly, and on his fringes Sigmar Polke and Martin Kippenberger, though I can't look to either of these latter two as directly without fizzling out; on a different fringe of his, Emma McIntyre, but I'm given pause even by the bare fact that I'm drawn to her paintings which once so forcefully put me off

So, I said "anything alchemical"; here's three images locating that motion

Marc Kokopeli, mainly, and on his fringes a little cloud or mist of Gandt-things (Magnus Peterson-Horner and Jeffrey Joyal, the Aristotle Psychological Facility itself whose interior surface and ornament was actually in a Christmas-decorated dream of mine)

Gauze, and the thought that with a long roll of loose-filamented gauze--or, in a different version, with clingwrap--I could wind horizontally around a section (or all) of a very vertical small canvas, either over or under an overall stretching of some other substrate; and that, in the case of gauze (not clingwrap) and over (not under), in a version I could thickly saturate the surface (or the non-edge patch of the surface) with rabbit skin glue (or with traditional gesso, RSG immixed with marble dust or with chalky powder looted from the dust collectors at work) between each pass, in another version eventually cutting or rubbing away everything that is not laid down by the paste, and into the eventual textured mummy I will rub a suspension of Silicoil caput mortuum in linseed (because a global bright white is to be avoided): and the three-dimensional form will be the hand arranging the marks, as in a Hantai without the unfolding, because the suspension will be broken or failing, the sediment already fucked to bits by months in the solvent, and so thinly distributed besides. There might need to be some kind of varnish to lock it into place and mitigate offgassing.

And these variations--ought they also all be sealed with a duck fat stamp? Perhaps that's a different grouping; and the seal can go in the site of a postage stamp, which is also a Polke-link if you hallucinate prodigiously enough ("Higher beings commanded: Paint the upper-right corner black!"), or in the central-to-lower-central position more wont for the old wax (a little to one side of what I sought, here is a watermark in a Descartes manuscript; I had been seeking an actual wax seal linked to a letter from his actual hand, because this sight would have been charged by the Nancy text, Ergo Sum, which taught me the word "la sigillographie")--Perhaps, as I say, this is a different grouping, a different taxonomy.

And here I am picking up speed, speaking of "taxonomies" and talking once again like I can course through conjugations with the Muybridgean speed of light refracting severally through a prism, the speed, that is, of a Grotjahn or a Sayre Gomez who can speak of commissioning dozens of assistant-hours of photorealism with the levity of an AbEx wrist-flick. But I feel that these humble gestures--the ones, I mean, necessitated by the above taxonomy-moves and conjugation-motions, which is to say, the building of dozens of at-least-initially-notionally interchangeable supports

As far as the supports go, I have an idea, because yesterday I squirreled away some fifty or a hundred feet of bass cleat offcut, and I now have a fast way to use it. What's the largest size, roughly, at a given aspect ratio, where the following exceptionally expedited recipe doesn't require a crosspiece?: Mitre the cleat offcut and form a simple rectangle; glue the junctions and fix each joint with a single v-staple shot from the front, so that if the metal sticks out of the wood it just sticks into what will be the negative space between the bevel and the stretched fabric. Sand the sharp edge (the front face), and that's all. If I want to get a little bit bigger, here is how I can add a crosspiece to the above: Glue a crosspiece to the back of the above, and fix the joints with pins from the back; then glue more (ideally flat, not cleated, but it doesn't really matter: The cleat won't be perceptible as long as the bar can eventually be flush to the wall) offcut to the rest of the rectangle, butt-jointing it to the crosspiece and clamping down each side's length to dry, then after dry trimming the whole thing back down to a rectangle without hitting the pins. The idea of all of this feels nice as long as the depth of every bar can be kept strictly under an inch and a half.

And I am firing with ideas for dimensions and repeating. I am firing on the hot- and fast-burning empty heat of repetitions. I am firing on an imagination of paintings that I would not have been able to love at any point in my life before the last year or two. I am operating under a counterintuitive optimism that gestures as shallow as what I am getting into hereabove and herebelow will become (netting out their perceptual weight and referential baggage) lighter than air, and precisely thereby get off the ground; the materials are barely-there gauze and hose, which joins with neoprene to dance around Magnus's cheesecloth, or a chickenwire mesh, or the fleece of Marc Kokopeli's plinths, the ones on which he set those rings, the ones on which he built diaper ATVs, the ones which (delightfully coherent-incoherent) "[informed] the exhibition with questions about the circularity of references to the fable of becoming an artist."

These paintings--not mine, but the ones in my head--are even lighter, even skimmer of substance, than Kokopeli's or Peterson-Horner's or Strau's or Krebber's or von Bonin's or Rapson's: Honey, skin glue, caput mortuum, duck fat, negative space itself (sanding, with the hand or the festool or the dremmel), contest between the stamp and the gesture, synergy and common ground between them (as the gesture always maintains a living, tensile link between the eye and the hand, and the eye is always foveated, no matter how free the range of the conjugation of answers to the question of what to foveate it upon).

Thinning out the substance of my painting until the suspension breaks (like a sauce: cuisine), or, if it succeeds, is frozen in the very

breaking, and is thus permanently splayed on that threshold, in that becoming.

I know I'm immediately walking back that thinning-out--but maybe by just enough, maybe only doing the bare minimum to maintain pictorial presence--when I say: The ideas I had near the beginning of my walk last Wednesday, couched in terms of copying after black and white photographies of Cézannes, are also, still, an angle I want to open these things up to, but not yet, it's like a room that shares a wall with the room I want to stay in now, and the room that shares a wall with that room, in turn, is a room in which color might find a way back in, color to perpetuate (and, notionally, reveal the initial origin of) the supply of caput mortuum, color, in these neighbor of my neighbor, being the iridescence of the reflection on pencil marks, and the other-colored Goethe-fringes of these first taches; in both of these cases, color arrives onto the blank only, really, as a mist, a flickering mist, situating me in direct relation to--but necessary on the far side of, specifically on the far side of the transatlantic paintings of--Mondrian, in other words, where I always wanted to be. And, in neighboring rooms meandering out from a different wall of where I am now: If I am stretching these vertically-formatted paintings with stitched-together fabrics, I ought to plumb-line-grid the fabrics before and after stretching, say, to tense questions which were already inherent to their very-sheer materiality. In other words, I want to articulate the part of my perspective that gives these ideas a proximity to Supports/Surfaces, and articulate, in this proximity, my distance from them, in the fact that (unlike them, and like Hantaï) I will always end up back on a stretcher, a real painting, to look at, to aspire after the livingness (the pulmonary expansion) of any Matisse (which Hantaï always maintained, and Buren etc. did not; that was the cliff Buren fell off; Hantaï always toed the line of death-in-painting, but his paintings were, perhaps for that very reason, always breathing, breathing like a Matisse, breathing like Duchamp (himself the breather, not "like a Duchamp")). I was materially imprecise. I meant that, when I bring the grid--the armature--back with the plumb line, here is how it will be done--and this thinning-out is a corrective to my earlier armature ideas which were all already too much, all already too heavy, and I always got already lost in their tangles and was never able to elegantly rejoin them with (re-graft them onto) the basic map of the alchemical core of my whole espresso cup account which exists now only in mists and can only by the lightest and most careful of first-baby-steps be made real as paintings. First I plumb an armature onto a stretched rectangle. Then I plumb an armature onto a (pinned, unstretched) piece of neoprene, and subsequently stretch it; maybe it had been stretched before, and the eventual rectangle bounds erasably marked. Then I do this latter thing with a very different support, one which will register stretching but not nearly so much. Then I seam two neoprene scraps together in a vertical stack and do it again; then I seam a neoprene scrap with a Paris one and register how that difference differs/registers; and so on, always drawing in a different way, first with charcoal and then with silverpoint and then with duck fat rolled with wax to be a crayon and then with skin glue and then with skin glue gesso and then with straightedge-sandpaper and then with a dremmel and--this is finally the way out of this room, and into contact with the Cézanne-found-image (traditional image, art-historical image, space-giving image: This is a complication, a little knot, which I might need

to separate out, first establishing the use of a found image and the gesture of gestural copie by means of, say, a Pontormo drawing, and turning to Cézanne only later when I feel the presence of the drawing calling out to something more than its gesture, its curve, its line itself, calling, that is, into relief, which leads me to da Vinci and a different way to give life to a painting (rilieva gives the surface its own specific proper interest, and ought not be complicated with too many other dimensions, ought to be left on its own on that surface in order to maintain my ultra-skin barely-there line), which leads me, separately, to Cézanne and the side of him that I tried previously to distill: Just the first breath of space, just its first opening-out, just the barest and simplest presence of that same sense that I first learned from certain Jonas Wood interiors and landscapes and Balthus landscapes

("L'imprenable"?) which required years of inspection and trial and error in order to distill into real paintings that I can really make, now.

("Now" being something rather anonymous but which in retrospect I can maybe hope to individuate by means of Straub and Krebber, and not the Krebber whose imitation Tatol showed to be empty, namely, the Krebber who performs impotence, but rather on the other hand the Krebber whom Magnus Peterson-Horner showed me to be very much alive: The one who produces (and Magnus does it too, like him) exquisitely potent qualia by passing always through a needle's-eye of paring-down; I add--and this is a superfluous extrapolation, as well as a reach--that the irreducibly interesting qualia of Kokopeli, even just as described by Tatol, are in precisely the same vein: Consummately potent for the very fact of their paring-down, which, by the way, justified the childhood topos of both of these artists, the one via babysitting and the other via educational videography, a foundationally Modernist interest and the only one among its peers (exoticism-fetishism, madness-fetishism) that still has legs this strong.)

I nearly lost my thread, but what I was about to say is this: That it is after the two separate neighboring rooms above independently arrive to that emergent common ground, after that, that they can be seen to share their own wall, and proceed from there into, I don't know, I don't know, hopefully I can at least keep myself as disciplined as I let on above at least until then, and then one by one I can charge these paintings with each of the other "suspect pleasures" in turn, like narrative and characterization and animation-motion and compositional complication (baroquing, as represented by the recombinations of armatures I have variously mentioned in the last couple months, recombinations often scaffolded with reference to specific talismanic paintings proper to my personal canon) and indulgent pre-constructed color chords (the readymade ones I have said I'd source from Grotzahn-Klimt or from Boscoreale-de-Kooning or wherever else I felt longevitized charge, as by contrast to the more basic vocabulary I will already have introduced, as described above, which is not quotably Stein-basic but which is, as I indicated, just one little step beyond Mondrian, by means of Goethe, or just what Mondrian could have learned from Goethe and did by the end) and--wow!--plaid, which I can show to be birthable from out of the verticals of the armatures I will already have, and, once I've put it into play, I can charge paintings with what Bella noticed in my recent plaid drawings, namely the difficulty of not just denoting it but of really making it palpable by strict means of grayscale drawing, say; and then I can charge other paintings with the dizzying sense of expansion that plaid often

gives me; but always I will restrict myself to doing something with plaid that feels aligned with what I've always wanted paintings to do--in other words, I will not be doing with it what Trockel did, or what Polke or von Bonin did with found fabrics, it won't primarily be about its trash aspect at all, it'll be about its pictorial-proper resonances which aren't easy to draw out but which I trust myself to be able to see, things about space that you can see in edge-tensed frontal plaid with only 1.1 or 1.15 or 1.3 repeatable square- / rectangle-units in the frame (that you can almost see, actually, in Trockel, though it was never commented on in her work), or other things not about space but about form and relief that you can see in a drawing of Chardin's scarf or in Matisse's *Manteau écossais*.

I feel myself right about to lose touch with what I was feeling, right about to blink and throw all of this away. Here is one attempt to give answers to questions that make everything fray, answers that will staunch the hemorrhage:

Are some of the stretched bars aluminum panels backed with little aluminum cradles? And do some of these in fact have no stretched fabric at all, realizing the distinct possibility that a painting can also be an inscription-registration surface (and importantly a technē-enabled one, if we get into concerns about the faithfulness of the registration of a gesture, and the degree of resolution in the registration's presencing or re-conjuring of the gesture to the viewer--or, in a different line if we get into concerns about the degree of resolution in the painting's eventual possible function in making possible the viewer's hallucination of dreams of spaces and/or figures)? Yes and yes.

So, I've bought myself a handful of minutes. And here is something I've been about to say for several hours (it's 2 p.m., and I'm coming back to interject just this thing that I've placeheld with the heading "deriving dimensions" after having to stop to make a schnitzel sandwich and then consequently failing to resume as always happens when I eat and I can feel my brain not working like a motor turning over and not starting when the ignition key is turned), an idea that reaffirms the almost shocking shallowness of what I am insisting defines this lighter-than-air line: But first a recollection of a story: Sometime near the very start of my time working at Custom Art Surface, when I thought I was going to completely restrict my use of the equipment and scrap to cutting panels from plywood, I was faced for the first time with a relatively open decision of what dimensions to pick, because until then I'd only obtained panels by deal hunting at Home Depot and most often returning empty handed and in any case only having marginal alternatives to option between. And when it was up to me, I searched online for the dimensions of certain square and nearly-square Mondrian paintings, because of, to be precise, two reasons. First, I wanted to conjure for my paintings a mode of viewing--a situation of distance, a kind of wall, say, and a site on the spectrum of what a painting asks from a body in front of it, what organs it engages, e.g. wrists or arms, brain or gut, preciousness or monumental dwarfing--a mode which I knew to be inaugurated best by Mondrian's own paintings (note that this is somewhat more specific than something else, also true of myself at the time but less true to my experience I remember it: That at the time Mondrian was the painter I thought most about and that I wanted to link myself to him by lifting his paintings' dimensions). Second, in the paintings I planned at that time to make, I wanted to do things in paint that were similar to what

Mondrian did, and I wanted to do them by means (with forms and their relations) that were similar (here I intend "similar" in a slight generalization of the proper geometrical sense of the word) to the means (the forms and their relations) that Mondrian used, and I didn't want to run the risk (or, in any case, to problematize the risk at that time) that such forms & relations would function significantly differently on different scales and in differently formatted rectangles. Some short time later, I learned from Peter that the dimensions--incorporating, that which is somewhat rare among CAS's clients, half- and quarter-inch measurements--of Mark Grotjahn's latest order were derived from the dimensions of certain paintings by Mark Rothko. He didn't relay, or didn't know, which ones or why. I felt exhilarated, vindicated, even, but also in a certain way prescient, and, most of all, proud, that I'd had what I thought was the same idea, independently. I didn't think long whether his reasons for doing this included any of the reasons I listed above--the first one that I was subscribing to, the second one that I wasn't quite, and the third that I was in particular caring about. Now, it is very important to me to name these constituent concerns--braided or blurred together--for now strictly for the sake of saying that what I want to do involves their outright negation in favor of a shallowness which precludes them, and to say that I want again to derive dimensions for paintings of mine from paintings of others, but that I want to take these dimensions from certain paintings of Josef Strau, of Cosima von Bonin, of Mathieu Malouf maybe, and maybe one or two others, precisely because I have derived from each of these certain specific and delicately interrelated sensations pertaining to, among other things, notions of interchangeability, discreteness (discrete-object-hood), painting-ness, quiddity, fabric-stretched-on-stretcher-ness, and objects-filling-galleries (or objects-filling-walls)-ness.
From Tears and new tears at Greene Naftali:

Dimensions (not necessarily of works pictured) include:

Misunderstanding, 2018

28 1/4 x 20 1/4 x 1 inches (71.8 x 51.4 x 2.5 cm)

Contagiousness, 2018

24 x 18 x 1 1/4 inches (61 x 45.7 x 3.2 cm)

Facetiousness, 2018

20 x 16 x 1 inches (50.8 x 40.6 x 2.5 cm)

Indulgence, 2018

16 x 12 x 1 inches (40.6 x 30.5 x 2.5 cm)

From Ulysses at Greene Naftali:

Pictured: Replicas and dream directors for U, 2022, Soldering iron, tin wire, marker on canvas, 35 1/2 x 47 1/8 inches (89.2 x 119.7 cm)

From Church of Daffy at Petzel:

Dimensions include:

LE SNOBISME DE L'ARGENT

2023

Wool, cotton, fleece

76 1/2 X 53 1/2 inches

194 X 136 cm

SATAN! PLEASE COME BACK

2023

Cotton, silk, velvet, fleece

67 1/4 X 54 inches

171 X 137 cm

BACKSTAGE TALENT ONLY

2023

Wool, cotton, fleece, silkscreen

56 X 80 inches

142 X 203 cm

MAN WANTED

2023

Wool, cotton, fleece

73 3/4 X 53 inches

187 X 135 cm

BOY WANTED

2023

Heavy cotton, wool, silk velvet, fleece

76 1/2 X 62 3/4 inches

194 X 158 cm

DÄMONENRÄUMDIENST

2023

Wool, cotton, fleece, silkscreen

57 1/2 X 80 inches

146 X 203 cm

I saw this painting at MOCA and was filled with a warmth in the stomach and brought almost to tears.

D'accord (2002), 102 3/8 x 78 3/4 in. (260 x 200 cm).

I was delighted by the sensation of walking through this empty gallery, a sense of emptiness, surfacehood, shallowness, extreme reliance upon (and

therefore extreme activation of) the very-few qualities or attributes or dimensions which were present.

Dimensions include:

22 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 32 $\frac{1}{2}$ in
38 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 59 $\frac{1}{4}$ in
36 x 50 in
39 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 60 in
46 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 62 in
32 x 39 $\frac{1}{4}$ in
43 x 60 $\frac{1}{2}$ in
39 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 69 $\frac{1}{4}$ in
28 x 39 $\frac{1}{2}$ in
37 x 60 in
43 x 73 in
37 x 47 in

And here, picking up something I also started saying earlier, is a little drawing to make present the image in my mind of these rooms sharing walls; up until now, the image in my head has been scaffolded upon the little model in Jake Longstreth's studio onto which he'd pinned tiny printouts of his paintings' reference images to show how he'd hang them in a Hetzler space, a former residence with parquet floors, in Berlin.

And, absurd though this mind palace (which is right now a mind garret) feels, in the way in which it pathetically repeats for a second time that "carta" I made who knows how long ago (the first time I repeated it, as tragedy, was in that visionary first outpouring of my intention to make paintings by restretching; these new paintings use restretching, but not like that, not so hurried as that, not as free or underdetermined as that, not yet, because I cannot yet bear it); now, in the second repetition, in my guignol-farce mode, with flickering sincerity, maybe I can finally turn its conjugation-vision into objects that I can not only touch and manipulate and move around but, always the whole point, which I can also perceive in their lightness and in their barely-there but always-there aliveness. If I couldn't follow the "carta," how could I expect to follow this? Because this, finally, if it finally works, will be because it is finally sufficiently overdetermined. With the way I thought I could work with "trobata" and freely compose them into paintings, the prospective results were always laughable in the face of the Tatol-trained "now"-conscious critic that inhabits part of my seeing-eye mind, because that plan was (momentarily, even willfully, but not therefore forgivably) ignorant of the weight of precedent which made the scraps I did succeed in painting feel childish in the wrong way. Only now

can I hope to be light enough, only now can I hope to be disciplined enough, only now that I've made it this simple.

Other questions are harder to answer because they're baser and more practical, but I can't help it, these are the questions that come into my mind.

What do I have to buy today? Wax, and a duck, and gauze, and thread, and I have to visit Daphne's, and it would be great if we could find a new table so I can order an easel online so I can do those plumb lines, but I don't have to do them quite yet. Once I've stretched what I made at Daphne's, I will prepare two kinds of rabbit skin glue, including, for the first time, a traditional gesso.

Are these "the autobiography of Ludovic Nemo"? Yes. Autobiography by performance first, rather than by depiction, because with the latter there was already too much variable-doubling, what is a dream, what is a memory, what is a self-portrait. But the core of that fiction is still to be present from the first. The core of the fiction, the duck fat and the espresso cup and the caput mortuum and the horse dealers who are not yet visible but whose presence in the background, whose past and present threat, is the very force which bluntly necessitates this radical paring-back: If I ever fall off the tightrope that is this ultralight line, I fall back into the horse-dealers hands. That is the key to what they are. They may have caught me once; that is how I, Ludovic Nemo, arrived to Los Angeles; but their allure--for all that I will go to greatest lengths to make its presence felt, its pull palpable--must not catch me again. In every new room, I will toe their line, I will bring them close, and I will slip through their cracks. They are the suspect pleasures. The morne repetition of history is their threat; they are the weight of history itself. I'm speaking in mock-manifesto Modernese, and the words feel too clunky already; that is why I have to cover over these "suspect pleasures" with nice names like "suspect pleasures" and "horse-dealers," cover them over once and for all and never so baldly name them again. I must now speak in this dream-language: They finally caught up to Ludovic Nemo in Lipp; his cheek still remembers the cold tile, and the worms-eye perspective of its recession; the duck fat is the material token--which is therefore alchemically active, because it functions by its sheer material presence, a pre-depictive (but not pre-pictorial) mark--which performs this fictive autobiography from the very first Ludovic Nemo painting, from the first, which is to say in the time before Ludovic Nemo makes possible (by way of progressive conjugation, and in particular the emergence of convergent horizontals out of a complicated conjugation of initially verticals-only armatures) the resource (which is also the allure! And which therefore must be indulged only to the very bare minimum) of the depictive representation of memory, first in just the worms-eye view of the Lipp tile itself, and only later in more fully narrative views, iterative characterizations of characters like the Maître, self-portraits even, even dated self-portraits which begin to indulge in a diarism that Picasso once dreamt of (with his precise dating & his offhand speculation about biography) and which I once held to be native only to music, best represented by Kurt Cobain in a live recording, say, and then bastardized by painting (first bit by bit, in diachronic virtuoso performance; this was preconscious but present in Velásquez, conscious and more present, then, in Manet, and finally histrionically overpresent in the mutually contradictory Modernist poles of Surrealist automatism and AbEx gesture)--and, aside from these dated

self-portraits, there can be Michelangelesque multiframe compositions indulging in yet more dimensions of the pictorialization of narrative, and so forth--and this was just one roughly linearized loose grouping of "suspect pleasures," but it still seems reasonable to me that "suspect pleasures" is to be precisely that body of charges which is always to be the source of animation in every Ludovic Nemo painting, and which is also, maybe, coincident with what has also gone by the names of "allure" and "horse-dealers."

So: That's why there's a duck fat mark in the very first of the Ludovic Nemo paintings. Later, other things can be done with duck fat, expanding on its latent charges: What are the flavors and perfumes stilled in it forever? What are the preformationist spirits, even? Of what spells is it the casting's byproduct (dross, caput mortuum in a figurative sense)? These are yet more things that can charge a painting. Yet more horse-dealers, in a different hinterland of the mind-garret, for now visible only as figments in one of its two or three windows.

If they ran Ludovic down in Lipp, then the image of them in his apartment--the one in which he sits with his back to the armoire--is a premonition, a fear. To paint one's fears, one's dreams, is another source of animation for paintings, another allure. An analytic of the "woes war" variety can generalize this thought to include all paintings: They are always the realization (& the manifestation, if they are shown) of some desire. This is one reason why a painting is always a dream, a reason located in its making. (A separate reason is located in the painting's apperception, and it is the flicker between these two reasons, these two accounts of every painting's dreamhood, that fascinated me in the past; now, I understand the flicker's dynamic, and seek to fabbro-reinstate it, eventually.)

Soon, I will lose it. For now, I've got it. For now, it's the utter discipline of keeping myself stupid enough to just do what I've said I'm going to do. Intoxication by means of lie.

My questions get stupider still. I want my canvases to be exaggeratedly vertical and verging on the talismanic, the totemic; but do I want that from the start, or do I want to start by repeating dimensions? I think I want the verticality from the start, but I don't want to segment it, I don't want to show that segmentation as a possibility yet, now do I want to do the low-hanging yet, not until there's something, a little picture or just a little mark, at the bottom of the tall rectangle to lower all the way down to foot height (which is not, as I've said, to lower it all the way down to the floor; I want it hung low, but still on the wall, not propped against it).

There's something I was going to say earlier but forgot to say and now it is not with the other things of like kind: That another "suspect pleasure" whose pull I feel fondly is that of the ontogenesis of "little guys," most especially in forms relating to the original little fabric thing that Bella made for Daphne which I perhaps remember so well because I stepped on a needle that night. Is it that there ought to be little guys (puppets, like Klee's; or like Elizabeth Englander's yoginis; or like Sayre Gomez's "Soldiers" which I learned about yesterday and which felt like the millionth iteration thereof but this very dryness could be capitalized-upon by reifying the type as-such) separate from the paintings? Or that the paintings themselves should be overcoded as little guys, e.g. by appending little feet and (and/or) maybe also little arms to them (and also by fine-tuning their dimensions, e.g. looking around

for paintings whose dimensions feel "little guy"-like) (and also, perhaps most importantly, by carefully choosing their substrate: My first hunch is fleece and/or neoprene (in case of "and," fleece under, neoprene over-around the whole thing, not in segments))? I think the answer to both of these possibilities is "yes" and "yes"; but to a third possibility, that of depicting "little guys" as characters, the answer is "no" unless it is in conjunction with the animation-motion introduction, or toward a separate impulse I have which is to make certain lares-penates-type "little guys" inhabit painting space in a very precise way which seems to inaugurate an induction which flows outward into the space in which the painting is hung, conjuring such sprites / elves in the corners, in the rafters, on the edges of surfaces (table fairies), etc. Adjacently related--but here I cut myself off so I don't break rigor for the bare sake of overwhelming affinity--this Lukas Quietzs painting (Untitled, 2023, gouache on canvas, 100 x 110 cm) shows a quintessentialized "Little guy," also doubles him (also, that is, problematizes doubling), and also exemplarizes the becoming-painting of a "little guy" in one particular way--that is, by first doubling him and then making the pair into a figure on a moderately tightly bounding ground, filling the figure's space and the negative space with patternings alike in kind but not in character and each equally and uniformly alive with texture.

As an aside: I note that, short of raising the issue of the absurd mass of espresso-cup and re-Symbolism, it could be said that a short background or "context" (because Los Angeles does not provide this, and neither do my friends because I do not have any) can be conjured by listing the following documents: What Strau wrote in 2006; what Tatol wrote about Michael Krebber Catalogue Raisonné vol. I; what I wrote about Magnus Peterson Horner at the Gaylord; and--little talisman--what I wrote about Henry Belden's exhibition there and sent to John. Is it some kind of self-defense mechanism that my own thought deploys against me, becoming intractably long any time I begin to feel I've gotten it into a good arrangement?

Here are transcriptions of notes I append to the above on a walk as the sun sets on the first evening of the year with the scent of honeysuckle and all other sweet things, the evening which every year cripples me with a wistful nostalgia that I can neither indulge in nor identify.

I am exhausted, but I'm trying to name the rooms that I spoke of in my note today. I think the first room is distinguished for having only the duck fat mark on every painting. The mark may be a little smudge in center-lower-center, or it may be a right triangle whose right angle coincides with the upper-right-hand corner, or (this will be in the case of all the other paintings besides these two) sort of vertical marks establishing the basic grammar of the armature. Marks made, ideally, with a plumb line, or at least with some kind of straight edge, and made with the duck fat having formed it with wax into some kind of a grease pencil. That's it for the markings on all the canvases in this first "room," unless I say otherwise; and if I say otherwise, or if I have reason to think otherwise, then I think it ought to be just an abstracted Pontormo line.

The presence of caput mortuum is a separate question, but it definitely needs to be somewhere in this room. Maybe on every painting. I think that, in all cases, the materials listed should just be oil and duck fat on [substrate; fill in, here, canvas, linen, neoprene, et cetera]. Gesso is often tacitly included if it is the primer, unstated in the materials list, and likewise with the wax that I will use as a varnish. I guess it must be that I resort to a press text to say that the only oil paint used on all of these canvases is a sort of caput mortuum residue from the Silicoil used in the painting of countless failed paintings, which is, materially, a broken or actively breaking suspension. As to dimensions and materials, pending retroactive contradiction, I think I should set up a combinatorial sort of n-dimensional Punnett square, and just keep the cells that look interesting to me--that is, pending below retroactive contradiction.

A room adjacent to this one maintains the wax-seal (central-lower-central) placement of the duck fat lump, and retains perhaps something of the materiality of the first room; but it has a whole world of imprints, solid, sigillographic imprints impressed into the lump: Ludovic's signature, puttiphalli, et cetera.

I haven't saved much by this shortcut of playing back the audio of what I wrote above and making voice notes, trying to extract a structure or an order of operations or a recipe from my too-long mess. Which is to say, I'll have to go back and fill in all the details anyway. But at least my electric amanuensis will do more than half the typing for me.

So, here's the room adjacent to the first one--the one which I was thinking of as the first room adjacent to the first one, and thinking of it as the one to the right of it, to the right and above in the little picture I drew. (But it's only the first adjacent room if you don't count, the one that houses the wax-seal-placement envelope paintings. Which, come to think of it, may as well be made on actual envelope. Why not have some so-called "works on paper"? Not that they'll be drawings or not-paintings. It'd be nice, and Mallarméan, to seal an empty envelope, and by the very act of its sealing, make the empty full--in the sense of an artwork's fullness of meaning, a Matisse's fullness of force, life, lung-air (pulmonary tension). The sealed empty envelope makes me think of Schrödinger, too, whose flicker is also one of the most basic and most recurrent descriptions of the qualia of the flicker that gives aliveness to aesthetic objects.)

So if that's the mail room, below-adjacent by a couple floors, then in the first room next door, there is color-hallucination (but there's nothing supernatural, it's just exegesis of what comes from the eye of color), which I initially described in terms of copies of black and white photographs of Cézanne paintings, but which I now think rather ought to begin with copies of Pontormo drawings and only afterward complicate itself on the theme of a black and white Cézanne which will helpfully sensitize many questions that are of concern for me, and which will be of more timely concern for me when I am really into the meat of the question of space for a painting, but for now, as I say, this is a way to get color straight out of a drawing copy after Pontormo, by bare means of attention. This, in retrospect, appears to me as the resolution of the problem I've really been faced with for the last several months: How to go from a drawing copying habit to a way of making paintings. Which also amounts to the problem of color (plus scale and placement within bounds).

(I know I'm also eliding the problem of originality, as though it's not something of concern to me right now.) Anyway, it seems fitting that the answer to that question about color is that it was only a matter of opening my eyes to it in the right way, fitting that the right way here is as simple and literal-minded as anything that I've called by the name of Baudelaire-abstraction, acknowledgment of the real, realization of the imaginary, etc., a realism as simple as a choice, the function of fiction itself, attention being the only currency that needs to be spent here, really. And the valorization of caffeine later down the road (when? Maybe that needs to interlock sooner than I think).

Either in a room on the other side of this one (this first-right one with the iridescent color), or, in a way, inside this room, there is to be an acknowledgment that there is some matter of choice involved in how to mix colors that I see, not as raw and simple as "thrownness," that I will have chosen by this point. And as a way to open things up as a corrective to the acknowledgment of that aspect of choice or arbitrariness, I think the answer is to make paintings off of all sorts of color-charges and cords that I see, and perhaps to conjugate the same thing with respect to all those different ways of setting up my color options and then using them to fill in the parts--to fill in, that is, realizations of the various colors that I see in the glint off of the graphite. (These seen colors, it can be noted, are really too pinprick-small to have much specificity of their own: they're too glinting, too changing, to be as stable as I will have by this point held them to be.) By this point, will I be copying after other things in pencil or drawing my own espresso cups with pencil? I don't know yet; that is a matter to be decided by the interlock-intersection with other rooms.

The "other rooms," then, the ones that follow the left hand branch, might as well amount to a list of all the "suspect charges," a list I gave above without much thought to the order, but I think I caught a glimpse of a good intersection between the two branches.

When I eventually do get to a Cézanne opening-up-of-space analytic on this right hand branch involving color (via the emergence of atmospheric perspective from out of the arbitrariness of the color selection--that's how I see it arising there on the right branch), here was my idea for how that will intersect with something from farther down the left branch. At some point on the left hand side, I will have done enough expanding into complicating of the armatures themselves, multiplying their verticals and giving them a little bit of depth and nearness by manipulating the ellipses' dimensions, and nesting armatures within other armatures, I will have given good reason to suggest that a painting can be animated by the very same force that can make a swatch of plaid sufficiently visually interesting--on its very own account, perhaps even without any non-gray scale colors. So once I've arrived to a place where I can simply just play with plaid from an armature, from a pure armature angle, then I can merge the two arms, by putting plaid into rilievo. At that point the source of "visual interest" becomes completely different and has very little to do with the plaid itself, and, as Bella pointed out, has everything to do with the question of how to paint--denote both the three-dimensional structure of the fabric and the spatialized pattern on the fabric at the same time. The precedents, Chardin and Matisse, only afford a single glimpse apiece of the electric possibilities that are possible when these variables are made to play in counterpoint. It will be up to me to make good new paintings out of them.

Here's a question that I think I need to resolve: Will there be restretching in the very first room? I think there will. But it won't encompass everything. It would be just one source of interest in these objects, and layering will be another one: Layering of gauze, layering of canvas, or layering of gesso until it is Rapson-thick. Restretching is its own kind of layering without building up material thickness, and it's not something cheap and post-internet-y or simply paint-school Polke-core, like the layering of projected images one over the other (that's why I insist on my plumb line to realize the armatures and never a projector). So, with this other source of layering, this materially thin one made from restretching, here is the idea for how it will look in the very first room: I think it will be a matter of deriving visual interest from the incrementalized distortion of the verticals of not-necessarily-identical superposed armatures. (It should be identical in one case but not in another, let's say.) This will make a sense of vibration, or of expansion, that is true to the Matissean vision of pictorial interest as a matter of aliveness, fullness, pressure, flows, and flickers. Is it clear what I'm talking about? I'm talking about the restretching of neoprene, and the way in which more slack can be gotten after each restretching, and an earlier-drawn armature progressively bows outward by a margin that might follow some kind of exponential decay, the mathematics of which are beside the point, because it's a practical application, not a Platonic realm of theory, and the theory only comes into play after the fact. For reasons of the mechanics of neoprene stretching, I think there should be at least a couple relatively large paintings in this first room. Maybe exactly too. Maybe they are my two large bars that I made. And the rest will be more Joseph Strau-sized, but thinner, and taller. And maybe one or two of them low to the ground. So now I have a pretty clear picture of what the first room looks like, And what values I will conjugate later in other rooms and will therefore need to hold constant or to refrain from rigorously in this first room (the left-hand-arm lists I was talking about). So, with that picture of the first room in my head--there's two large paintings with the changing armatures, restretched neoprene; and maybe a smaller neoprene work with restretching too, or a couple smaller ones; and other smaller paintings in vertical format, involving material layering; and all of the above involving duck fat and caput mortuum; and the press release, perhaps, providing the pretext for the memory, which is here rehearsed with consummately restricted means: I can already see a reason why I would like to consider the paintings in this room--it's embarrassing to say it out loud, but--I like that the theme is repetition, together with fiction and alchemy. I like that the only thing I started with was a love of the possibility of real successful alchemy by means of fiction, and what I got to organically, because of my long-standing sense that declensional and conjugational structures are the source of all caffeine in the world, or are at least the source of anything I'm capable of, the point that I got to is a pair of planes on which the same game of progressive repetition and change plays out. effectively throwing the most light on the repetition itself--which might be read (though not necessarily) as a trauma response specific to Ludovic Nemo's story, or as a trauma response specific to modernity, performed here in a way that can be read (though not necessarily) as a rehearsal that comments (by way of performance) on the inevitable pattern of recurrences that fills up contemporary art now, and that only succeeds in attaining aesthetic value, if it ever does so,

in the same manner in which Mark Kokopeli and Magnus Peterson Horner succeeded: namely, by sheer dint of rigor and restraint.

There is a second list of suspect pleasures near the bottom, and then a bit past that list there's one more addition, about little guys. To the "little guys" one I want to add one more idea about them: That with the stitching and restretching (Monika Baer has done something similar to this but I think it's still worth doing) I can do something to pictorial space. A little guy can be made to be caught in a seam, crawling out of it. This feels kind of lame on its own. But I see it as contiguous with a number of other ways in which I want to make all space feel populated by such sprites. If it's in this context, I think it's a valuable strategy among several others.

In short, here is my working picture:

* In the first room, Ludovic's room with his back to the armoire; everywhere a duck fat mark and a caput mortuum wash and--I think--the Lipp floor, not really in "perspective" but just as a pattern and in a worm's-eye view, such that the armatures look like they're stuttering to understand it. I said "The mark may be a little smudge in center-lower-center, or it may be a right triangle whose right angle coincides with the upper-right-hand corner, or (this will be in the case of all the other paintings besides these two) sort of vertical marks establishing the basic grammar of the armature. Marks made, ideally, with a plumb line, or at least with some kind of straight edge, and made with the duck fat, having formed it with wax into some kind of a grease pencil. That's it for the markings on all the canvases in this first "room," unless I say otherwise; and if I say otherwise, or if I have reason to think otherwise, then I think it ought to be just an abstracted Pontormo line. The presence of caput mortuum is a separate question, but it definitely needs to be somewhere in this room. Maybe on every painting. I think that, in all cases, the materials listed should just be oil and duck fat on [substrate; fill in, here, canvas, linen, neoprene, et cetera]. Gesso is often tacitly included if it is the primer, unstated in the materials list, and likewise with the wax that I will use as a varnish. I guess it must be that I resort to a press text to say that the only oil paint used on all of these canvases is a sort of caput mortuum residue from the Silicoil used in the painting of countless failed paintings, which is, materially, a broken or actively breaking suspension. As to dimensions and materials, pending retroactive contradiction, I think I should set up a combinatorial sort of n-dimensional Punnett square, and just keep the cells that look interesting to me--that is, pending below retroactive contradiction." And: "Here's a question that I think I need to resolve: Will there be restretching in the very first room? I think there will. But it won't encompass everything. It would be just one source of interest in these objects, and layering will be another one: Layering of gauze, layering of canvas, or layering of gesso until it is Rapson-thick. Restretching is its own kind of layering without building up material thickness, and it's not something cheap and post-internet-y or simply paint-school Polke-core, like the layering of projected images one over the other (that's why I insist on my plumb line to realize the armatures and never a projector). [THIS BRACKETED NOTE SHOULD REFER, I THINK, TO A SECOND ROOM: So, with this other source of layering, this materially thin one made from restretching, here is the idea for how it will look in the very first room: I think it will be a matter of deriving visual interest from the incrementalized distortion of the verticals of not-necessarily-

identical superposed armatures. (It should be identical in one case but not in another, let's say.) This will make a sense of vibration, or of expansion, that is true to the Matissean vision of pictorial interest as a matter of aliveness, fullness, pressure, flows, and flickers. Is it clear what I'm talking about? I'm talking about the restretching of neoprene, and the way in which more slack can be gotten after each restretching, and an earlier-drawn armature progressively bows outward by a margin that might follow some kind of exponential decay, the mathematics of which are beside the point, because it's a practical application, not a Platonic realm of theory, and the theory only comes into play after the fact. For reasons of the mechanics of neoprene stretching, I think there should be at least a couple relatively large paintings in this first room. Maybe exactly too. Maybe they are my two large bars that I made. And the rest will be more Joseph Strau-sized, but thinner, and taller. And maybe one or two of them low to the ground.] So now I have a pretty clear picture of what the first room looks like, And what values I will conjugate later in other rooms and will therefore need to hold constant or to refrain from rigorously in this first room (the left-hand-arm lists I was talking about). So, with that picture of the first room in my head--there's two large paintings with the changing armatures, restretched neoprene; and maybe a smaller neoprene work with restretching too, or a couple smaller ones; and other smaller paintings in vertical format, involving material layering; and all of the above involving duck fat and caput mortuum; and the press release, perhaps, providing the pretext for the memory, which is here rehearsed with consummately restricted means: I can already see a reason why I would like to consider the paintings in this room--it's embarrassing to say it out loud, but--I like that the theme is repetition, together with fiction and alchemy. I like that the only thing I started with was a love of the possibility of real successful alchemy by means of fiction, and what I got to organically, because of my long-standing sense that declensional and conjugational structures are the source of all caffeine in the world, or are at least the source of anything I'm capable of, the point that I got to is a pair of planes on which the same game of progressive repetition and change plays out. effectively throwing the most light on the repetition itself--which might be read (though not necessarily) as a trauma response specific to Ludovic Nemo's story, or as a trauma response specific to modernity, performed here in a way that can be read (though not necessarily) as a rehearsal that comments (by way of performance) on the inevitable pattern of recurrences that fills up contemporary art now, and that only succeeds in attaining aesthetic value, if it ever does so, in the same manner in which Mark Kokopeli and Magnus Peterson Horner succeeded: namely, by sheer dint of rigor and restraint.”:

- * Repetition as layering
 - * Piling up of layers
 - * Existing Paris-strip-glued totem
 - * Gauze and plastic wrapping, conjugation as described above
 - * Stitching together of materials
 - * Vertical striping: This is weird but I think it would be good to have black and white vertical neoprene stripes in alternation; I think the wobbly uneven stretch would be nice
 - * Horizontal striping
 - * One with several relatively evenly sized bands

* One where the top half (or more) is all one piece (of a different material? No, I don't think so: I want it to be like that one Quietzsch painting) and the lower half is several bands of varying sizes

* Can I make one whose fragment-stitching is derived, at humorous sacrifice-cost, from the fragment-stitching in a fragment-stitching canvas of Theo's? Or of Quietzsch's?

* [MOVED TO "LEFT ARM, FIRST ROOM":] Repetition as superposition of armatures

* Two large bars, the ones I built, stretched with neoprene, are part of this:

* This also applies to some small bars too

* (In the mailroom underneath it:) "A room adjacent [subjacent] to the first one maintains the wax-seal (central-lower-central) placement of the duck fat lump, and retains perhaps something of the materiality of the first room; but it has a whole world of imprints, solid, sigillographic imprints impressed into the lump: Ludovic's signature, puttiphalli, et cetera." And: "the wax-seal-placement envelope paintings, come to think of it, may as well be made on actual envelope. Why not have some so-called "works on paper"? Not that they'll be drawings or not-paintings. It'd be nice, and Mallarméan, to seal an empty envelope, and by the very act of its sealing, make the empty full--in the sense of an artwork's fullness of meaning, a Matisse's fullness of force, life, lung-air (pulmonary tension). The sealed empty envelope makes me think of Schrödinger, too, whose flicker is also one of the most basic and most recurrent descriptions of the qualia of the flicker that gives aliveness to aesthetic objects."

Down the right-hand arm:

* A second room: "in the first room next door, there is color-hallucination (but there's nothing supernatural, it's just exegesis of what comes from the eye of color), which I initially described in terms of copies of black and white photographs of Cézanne paintings, but which I now think rather ought to begin with copies of Pontormo drawings and only afterward complicate itself on the theme of a black and white Cézanne which will helpfully sensitize many questions that are of concern for me, and which will be of more timely concern for me when I am really into the meat of the question of space for a painting, but for now, as I say, this is a way to get color straight out of a drawing copy after Pontormo, by bare means of attention. This, in retrospect, appears to me as the resolution of the problem I've really been faced with for the last several months: How to go from a drawing copying habit to a way of making paintings. Which also amounts to the problem of color (plus scale and placement within bounds). (I know I'm also eliding the problem of originality, as though it's not something of concern to me right now.) Anyway, it seems fitting that the answer to that question about color is that it was only a matter of opening my eyes to it in the right way, fitting that the right way here is as simple and literal-minded as anything that I've called by the name of Baudelaire-abstraction, acknowledgment of the real, realization of the imaginary, etc., a realism as simple as a choice, the function of fiction itself, attention being the only currency that needs to be spent here, really. And the valorization of caffeine later down the road (when? Maybe that needs to interlock sooner than I think)."

* A second (?) in which "Either in a room on the other side of this one (this first-right one with the iridescent color), or, in a way, inside this room, there is to be an acknowledgment that there is some matter of choice involved in how to mix colors that I see, not as raw and simple as "thrownness," that I will have chosen by this point. And as a way to open things up as a corrective to the acknowledgment of that aspect of choice or arbitrariness, I think the answer is to make paintings off of all sorts of color-charges and cords that I see, and perhaps to conjugate the same thing with respect to all those different ways of setting up my color options and then using them to fill in the parts--to fill in, that is, realizations of the various colors that I see in the glint off of the graphite. (These seen colors, it can be noted, are really too pinprick-small to have much specificity of their own: they're too glinting, too changing, to be as stable as I will have by this point held them to be.) By this point, will I be copying after other things in pencil or drawing my own espresso cups with pencil? I don't know yet; that is a matter to be decided by the interlock-intersection with other rooms."

* When I eventually do get to a Cézanne opening-up-of-space analytic on this right hand branch involving color (via the emergence of atmospheric perspective from out of the arbitrariness of the color selection--that's how I see it arising there on the right branch), here was my idea for how that will intersect with something from farther down the left branch. At some point on the left hand side, I will have done enough expanding into complicating of the armatures themselves, multiplying their verticals and giving them a little bit of depth and nearness by manipulating the ellipses' dimensions, and nesting armatures within other armatures, I will have given good reason to suggest that a painting can be animated by the very same force that can make a swatch of plaid sufficiently visually interesting--on its very own account, perhaps even without any non-gray scale colors. So once I've arrived to a place where I can simply just play with plaid from an armature, from a pure armature angle, then I can merge the two arms, by putting plaid into rilievo. At that point the source of "visual interest" becomes completely different and has very little to do with the plaid itself, and, as Bella pointed out, has everything to do with the question of how to paint--denote both the three-dimensional structure of the fabric and the spatialized pattern on the fabric at the same time. The precedents, Chardin and Matisse, only afford a single glimpse apiece of the electric possibilities that are possible when these variables are made to play in counterpoint. It will be up to me to make good new paintings out of them.

Down the other arm, in interlocking parallel:

* * In the hinterland, which one by one intervenes to loop off as detours (local extrema) and also to interlock the several then-extant arms:

* There is a second list of suspect pleasures near the bottom, and then a bit past that list there's one more addition, about little guys. To the "little guys" one I want to add one more idea about them: That with the stitching and restretching (Monika Baer has done something similar to this but I think it's still worth doing) I can do something to pictorial space. A little guy can be made to be caught in a seam, crawling out of it. This feels kind of lame on its own. But I see it as contiguous with a number of other ways in which I want to make all space feel populated by such sprites. If it's in this context, I think it's a valuable strategy among several others

7 February 2025

Tatol review of Jutta Koether re-articulating (in yet another refracted form, refracted through a positive example) his vision of artistic quality, in a way that, if I delude myself a little, I can see in my latest "vision" / "plan" (heart breaks to use these crass words) above.

Jutta Koether - 1982, 1983, 1984 - Galerie Buchholz - ***.5

This early work is very scrappy, even borderline crude and indistinct, and it isn't a high point of an artist's brilliant burst onto the scene but the great expectations of a promising artistic long game. They're interesting to see within the context of her later paintings, but aside from the one in the press materials and the relatively large one on a muddled cream background with an inscrutable composition of a black v-shape and three vertical lines (there's also a drawing of the same but upside down) they aren't particularly compelling. The press release emphasizes her relationship to the music magazine SPEX at the time, and the DIY countercultural context is clarifying. Approaching painting as an elemental, stripped-down procedure, like the "bare bones" of punk or folk music, making small paintings in her room, building her artistic sensibility from the ground up, operating off of little more than instinct and hard work. This sets the stage for a daunting task of artistic development, of laboring to find a way of making art when the tools haven't been handed to you. The threat of immediate success is hitting on a shallow trick and being shackled to that limited methodology forever; it's far better to take your time developing a mature approach to making art that enables perpetual depth of development and variation.

...

8 February 2026

Disparate ideas, projections of directions that might lead outward from the faint first layout-map of my mind-garret:

In church I pictured the text of Ave Maria spelled out in a circle. The circle should, perhaps, have been a rotund specimen of ellipse, but the circle is after all a species of ellipse too. At a later point at which a Marian scaffolding will have already been introduced--by means, first, of the use of Pontormo's Visitation as the scaffold (happenstance objective-correlative) for the first complicatio of the armature as something involutable, recombining, in a word baroqueable, and after this first broaching of the Marian theme, its gradual filling out as, next, at this point I'm describing here, a tripling into Visitation-Magnificat-Ave, which is to say, a tripling by means of utterance-cataloguing, a tripling which colors Mary with cyclicity and speech-agency; afterward, I will remain forever frequently on the Marian

theme, with its development resembling what I've hazily sketched twice, most recently involving hortus conclusus gardens (in one of my large sketch books), and earlier involving the troubadour-Sicilian line through the deep history of (transfigurative amour courtois etc.) lyric (in my "Carta" and elsewhere). By this point of tripling which I describe, also, text must have been introduced; I see this as having happened by means, first, of the signature and the signature's suspended activation as a compositional element (familiar from Grotjahn, but different for Ludovic), a corruption of the signature (Ludovic Nemo, Nemo, Ludovic, Ludo, Ludic Nemesis, a puttiphalllic sign, Ludovicus, Ludocommodus vicus) which somehow begins to creep into a mantraic function (text unto texture, as with Hantai's Ecriture rose but here proceeding by means graphically more akin to Lukas Quietzsich from out of Grotjahn's painterly signature-play). Then I'll be able to write an Ave around an ellipse (appearing as isolated from an armature, and subsequently multiplying in ways not seen before, ways marked by what was inherent to the Ave: Tenfoldness, fivefoldness of the tenfold, and so on).

I am impelled to imagine these mistily projected developments with a different picture, leaving the Longstreth-Hetzler model picture aside because of its spatial limits, trading it for a flow-tree more or less resembling my old "Carta," an arborescence not without subsequent re-fusions previously-divergent branches, an arborescence marked even more prevalently by sites of influence exerted magnetically (and mutually, if asymmetrically) among disparate sites / limbs / lobes (a dynamic which reminds me of the folding of a complicated peptide).

When the paintings get big their dimensions and baroque armature-structure ought to converge upon the structure of the high-Rhenish limewood altarpiece, and perhaps the materiality of this latter can (in a sort of backwash of flows, perhaps better imagined as countless simultaneous osmoses of which only one or a handful can be easily considered at a time but which in reality are really all always universally transpiring) percolate into my paintings whose wood supports, which will always have been there, can become scrubbed wood like Shaker or Carinthian furnishings, limewood, limewood sealed with a rabbit skin concoction and perhaps polychromed but if so only in such a way as that very trace traces only will survive (a fixation upon patina as-such, shared by Michelangelo as Nagel pointed out and, according to Francisco, also all the Werner artists).

11 February 2026

Yesterday afternoon, driving to Chinatown for a delivery, I learned from Michael Krebber (in his ArtCenter talk about eight years ago) about Monsieur Teste, for him as important as des Esseintes as a defining type of the dandy. He said the discovery of Monsieur Teste was a revelation for him because he stripped Baudelaire and Huysmans's invention of its customary obsession with appearance, fashion, self-presentation. This was naturally of interest to me, as I would often be just as happy to set this dandy-aspect aside; sometimes I drag myself, or am dragged, through

spells of interest in that kind of superficiality, but the shoe doesn't fit me too well.

I read-skimmed the novella, in French and in English, last night and this morning, and then read a recent review (by Benjamin Kunkel of N+1, in the New Yorker), thinking all this very dandyish (and licensed by Krebber himself, who jokishly described recently reading for the first time Melville's *Pierre*, which had long been one of his favorite books). Before turning to the review my thoughts were these two, which are still the main ones:

First, that if in *Teste* Valéry offers a dandy-essence stripped of the inessential interest in his own image, my choice if given the chance to pare down *Teste* in his own turn would be to make him lose his affect of imperiousness. (It remains an open question whether it's of any use to adjust *Teste* in the zone of the way he comes off, when *Teste* himself positively avows that this territory is beyond his pale; open, too, the question of whether appearance-fixation was divorceable from the figure of the dandy in the first place.)

Second: vertigo in the sheer commensurability of *Teste*'s endeavor with my own, my "notes" at large, and specifically my "re-Symbolism," "re-Formalism," my "Summa," in all its tangled aspirations to self-sufficiency, to case-study status, to restriction to its own terms even in these terms' own "tragic" (Mondrian) "thrownness" (Heidegger) or "contingency" (Mallarmé, Landy, & most others' term for the same). It's still completely opaque to me whether this so-called "project" of mine can ever be brought up to even what measure of legibility and self-cohesion *Teste* can claim. (The possibility is open, in any case, that seeking that showability would undermine the whole affair; I'm reminded of how *Teste* himself writes off any admiration of greatness as already compromised with inauthenticity by the fact of its being a representation--the author/artist's representation of himself.)

In the meantime, I'll touch my finger to certain pulses where I am inclined to believe in my own project more than *Teste*'s, and other pulses where I am eager to seamlessly graft his working bits (functions, flows, little discoveries) onto my own. All from Kunkel:

I share something of the manner of Valéry's interest in a certain timelessness: "Valéry may glancingly acknowledge a phenomenon like the railway, but his lyric poetry and his sole novel-like excursion into prose, *The Evening with Monsieur Teste*," exhibit very little interest in the mechanical paraphernalia and Edisonian impedimenta of modern times, or in the social conditions that accompany them."

Oh, here I am: "... the long mysterious periods in which Valéry--"the great poet who can hardly bring himself to write poetry, who can hardly even bring himself to explain why he cannot bring himself to write poetry"--published nothing at all. (In this case, a modernist aesthetic of silence concealed a private prolixity: the "Cahiers," some thirty thousand pages of entries in notebooks, kept over fifty years, which appeared in full only after Valéry's death.)" In this respect I consider my dandyism superior to Valéry's: The only thing better is a would-be great poet who can hardly bring himself to write poetry and who, therefore, actually doesn't.

But I suppose even Valéry's notes are more useful to others than mine, more mustered unto certain uses, less hobbled by an utter dependence on their own circular references, and not lapsing into the ghastly excruciation of boredom I found when recently I revisited my notes from

January-February 2025, and was astonished by the snail-slow pace I managed to keep at that time.

I never muster moments of compelling legibility such as would make the following observation possible: "Among the major products of [the intention to work out "a System (in the physio-chemical sense)" that accurately reflected the conservation and transformation of those forms of energy known as thoughts] were Valéry's youthful essays on literary technique."

But I am, at least as much as he, interested in my work as tending toward--interested in pushing, always nudging, my thinking toward--such a system: Always gradually "[dispensing] with imprecision: vague words "like volition, memory, ideas, intelligence, time, etc., etc.!", might suffice for daily use, but the writer "must seek to find more subtle instruments."" His dispensing with them tried to be peremptory, but I think that's what landed him in an abstraction which, in the end, limits his project's usefulness. I try to defeat that sort of imprecision by means of long-term precision-by-degrees, progressively narrowing down the form of the prism-core of each idea by countlessly multiple exposures through their lenses.

It's useful that Valéry's post-Symbolist worldview is already very close to my own, in terms of its aesthetic ontology--in terms, I mean, of its account of the workings of poem-objects between minds. The view is basically Mallarmé's, and it's basically Pound's (Pound and Eliot got Mallarmé through Valéry); thus, it's mostly contiguous with my own, that I've scaffolded so far as possible upon the same frame.

Teste is mistrustful of "even the rather precise work of poetry," even if he hesitates to throw it out along with everything else; I, likewise, am at least provisionally mistrustful of everything but painting, and even painting is held always on a certain kind of trial, its status made always to flicker, subject always to tests and pressures. All this does is to situate me in an extremely broad and diverse conversations that includes such mutually incommunicating (not to say incommunicable) projects as Hantaï's and Joselit's, Bois's and Krebber's, Graw's and Grotjahn's. (Polke and Warhol coagulate as durationally-constituted centers of this broadest-cast territory; but I insist that Hantaï is more relevant than he seems, even a third leg (ha ha) that their stool topples without.)

I found an Hantaï shibboleth, "crible machinal," in Monsieur Teste; I couldn't remember a mention of Valéry between Hantaï and his many interlocutors. In any case, I'd say that Hantaï stands for the sort of humility and patience that I find lacking in the Teste project. Teste is "not yet low enough" (and in feeling this sentence come to my mind, I'm made also to wonder how contiguous Beckett is with Valéry, and what shunting separates my route out of Valéry from his, or whether any does at all).

Here I see unqualifiedly much of myself: Teste "compels "the use, if not the creation, of a forced language, sometimes one that is vigorously abstract." Teste, dispassionately interested in himself simply as the human subject most available to his investigations, studies his soul as a mathematical combinatory of possibilities. Obsessive speculation on what a person such as himself might feel or do meanwhile entails that Teste feels and does very little. He speaks, Valéry's narrator notes, in "muted" tones and makes only "sober" gestures."

This is unbearably poignant to me (I say with dry eyes): "I confess I have made an idol of my mind, but I have found no other." This means that Teste consecrates himself to a basically hypothetical existence. Even his thoughts are not so much thoughts as they are notions about possible ideas." But besides weeping for myself, I'm thinking of John Kelsey's piece about Michael Krebber (of which Krebber himself was very fond), and in particular its theme of the relation between possibility and actuality. As far as this relation goes--seen not as a polarity but as an intricate, musical matter, in the vein of Bergson and Heidegger--this is where I feel closest to Krebber and to Kelsey. See, for example, "When Krebber hangs the readymade horse upside down, we might note that he repeats Baselitz, for example, but the important thing is that this repetition renews the possibility of Baselitz in the present moment, and thus also that of Krebber, stuck as he is. Such an "emptying appropriation" not only captures and claims the stolen gesture or image, it makes it return with a difference. Repetition, as Giorgio Agamben has said regarding both messianic history and cinematic montage, is a strategy of renewing the possibility of what was ("that which is impossible by definition, the past"), of disassociating an identity from its proper place in order to produce a transformation."

Fear of fears--that someone could write something like this of my "espresso cup" (if I ever figure out how to write it, or how to do anything else with anything in these "notes"): "'Monsieur Teste' is certainly not a novel or novella in the ordinary sense; it's more like a lightly fictionalized intellectual diary."

Kunkel sketches Teste's lineage, which is not nearly linear enough to be a useful continuation of the rigorous and systematic (at least earnest and deliberate) aspect of Valéry's work, but which, anyway, arcs across the dearest stars in my sky: "if 'Teste' seems to have been the first book of its kind, it was hardly the last. In 1902, Hugo von Hofmannsthal produced his 'Lord Chandos Letter,' in which a fictional seventeenth-century aristocrat confesses to Teste-like doubts about the adequacy of language to convey experience. In 1910, Valéry's friend Rainer Maria Rilke published 'The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge,' first called 'The Journal of My Other Self' and narrated not by Rilke but by his alter ego Brigge. Fernando Pessoa's posthumous 'Book of Disquiet,' composed from the nineteen-tens to the thirties, also comes to mind: a thick sheaf of philosophical and psychological fragments ascribed to Pessoa's stand-in Bernardo Soares. Like Valéry, the writers of these extraordinary works of prose were poets. In each case, the fractional difference between the writer's actual self and his alter ego seems to have given him license not so much to confess [I've said the same thing in response to a preemptive doubts about how it will read when I impose the claim to 'autobiography' upon such narrative- and persona-voided paintings as I conceive] (these are not salacious or even, really, very personal books) as to think and feel as he otherwise could not, as if it were impossible to say what was happening inside oneself if one's official self were the place where such things had to happen."

"Valéry's 'Teste' did not inaugurate a new branch of literature along the lines he had laid out. The prolonged, preliminary thought of a scientific literature of pure possibility evaporated as soon as it hit the ground. The technical psychiatry and neurobiology of later times necessarily lacked Valéry's poetry, and the poets themselves could never make good on his scientism without ceasing to write poetry." Maybe I can. I'm no poet.

""The Steps," in which the poet hears the footfalls of a lover as she approaches with a kiss. Its final stanza suggests, in hesitant octameters, a sort of key to Valéry's infatuated aloofness from experience:

Don't rush that act of tenderness,
Sweetness of being and not being,
For I have lived in expectation,
My beating heart became your steps.

The translation is by Nathaniel Rudavsky-Brody, from "The Idea of Perfection" (2020), an excellent selection from Valéry's poetry and notebooks. And the lines illustrate how much of the sweetness of being is, for Valéry, the simultaneous sweetness of not being—how far the anticipation of life goes toward constituting life's actual incarnation." How far, in other words more my own, the redemption of life transpires from out of imagination of itself, from within itself, inhering in the very vibration or flickering that is the dimension of "doubling" always involved in any imagination, any fiction, marked always by a certain empreinte indexically linking world and thought (here I generalize Mallarmé's concept of empreinte outward from its original application to the act of writing a poem; it applies, more broadly, to all acts of fiction, which is to say, to all acts of art, all acts of imagination, all moments of living as personal beings with minds).

Here, I am reminded of the deepest & most valuable insight from a talk given by Isabelle Graw (at the Jewish Museum, from her then-in-progress book *Love of Painting*; I was listening to this, too, in anticipation of yesterday evening's shameful sham of a conversation between her and Sterling Ruby, who, as it turns out, has absolutely nothing going on upstairs), wherein she observes the general validity of the law that the more rigorously the artist arranges to remove himself from the painting, the more the painting itself becomes invested by his personal aura (she doesn't use this term; she calls it the illusion of the artist's presence, or something). She cites Warhol, Polke, Richter, Guyton; I am left wondering about the extension of this analytic to Kribben and von Bonin, Strau and on to Micheala Eichwald or Mathieu Malouf and whoever else I care most about now. Anyway here's the parallel in *Teste*: "The ultimate effect is paradoxical: the more that Valéry eliminates the ghost of pain and passion from the logical machinery of his work, the starker and more affecting the moans and cries of the ghost become. It may not be a general law of literature that the writer will end up emphasizing the strong emotions inside his or her work precisely to the extent that he or she tries to eliminate them—but Valéry the would-be scientist would probably appreciate any research into the phenomenon's wider application."

Kunkel finally lands on a point at which it becomes more clear than ever that Hantai is the missing link. "In a last fragment, the eponymous researcher of himself speaks of "syllogisms impaired by agony, thousands of images bathed in pain, fear mingled with lovely moments from the past." Agony, pain, fear: these are the inexpungable residue of *Teste*'s probabilistic exercises, an indivisible remainder that carries over from one calculation to the next—and perhaps the motivation for engaging in such desperately abstract exercises in the first place. ... For all that he vaunts his taste for precision, Valéry's most eloquent word is surely [in "The Cemetery by the Sea"] this stammering it, it, it." Wo es war, soll ich werden: Freud stated it once, without sufficient ground but, despite

himself, dead right. Heidegger was perhaps a step closer to self-justification in his restatement of the role of contingency, treated by him under the name "thrownness." Now here I am, trying to pick up where they and choice others have left it off, unconvinced of the effectiveness of my chosen means, this comically intractable case study, these notes.

It's now 10:26 a.m.; my notes on Teste, unplanned, took more than two hours; I meant to start my day by making a fuller note of how John Kelsey makes contact, in his piece on Cosima von Bonin, with Strau's own vision of dandyism, and how this alignment sits perfectly with my little ecstatic vision of freedom such as I glimpsed it in Duchamp and Godard.

But first, before it gets any too-later, I want to try to write down the way things seemed so clear and expansive and perfect and good to me last night, when I was swimming in those bits of Monsieur Teste after bathing in Krebber for a day (and also a week).

But--and maddeningly--I cannot; I feel exhausted, even by the comically small feat of considering glancing considerations of a short book I've barely read. I eat, a scrumptious honey yogurt with dates and hazelnuts and Turkish apricots and Brazil nuts and cinnamon and salt, and afterward my little espresso in my favorite cup, and I become scattered and empty, I begin to twitch and to itch and to wonder whether there is something wrong with me not just personally but chemically, whether I have if not brain cancer then at least the bad kind of autism.

I can't remember what was in my head last night. I think I might have been feeling good, as I still half-heartedly do (but staking everything on it!), about the presence of fiction--the barest shade of it--I mean the Ludovic Nemo--at the core of my paintings, such as I conceive them (not that they are anything solid enough to have a core, not that they are Cézanne apples, but anyway as facets of a prismatic vision (which is trivially true of any art-object constitutable as such by sole means of a gaze, and is therefore to make no presumptuous claim for them) there is something which they gather around--do I make myself clear?--they render real (by repetitioned Baudelaire-abstraction) a self, their painter, a sensibility marking a little maker, the concerns held in common from one canvas to the next).

Feeling good about the idea of the fiction there as such, feeling that it was a nice idea and good for paintings and even good for painting, to have paintings with this idea. Feeling good, too, outside of the baseball, because it crossed my mind that this fiction, in a nice (what mathematicians call "elegant," pointing to the same quality that makes an object like Johns's flag and Warhol's Marilyn a nice object, just the right object, highly determined with no noticeable remainder of any quality in excess) little way, added Strau to my Krebber. This almost made me smile. And then I got really worked up when, late in his talk (this was eight years ago, I think; it's worth pointing out again how outdated I am), Krebber expressed a sort of a belief in fiction as a way forward, as a way forward for art, but set it aside for younger people.

I like how wispy is my story of Ludovic Nemo and the horse dealers at Brasserie Lipp. There's almost ("almost") no story there at all--and so it may even be bare enough to fit well into paintings.

Am I out of date? It nags me, because I don't hear much chatter of Krebber and Strau in Los Angeles in 2025 (the year I'm still living in, having fallen into a morne and ugly muteness and non-function at least since falling into the rhythm of my job), let alone 2026. For signs of life in this vein I grasp--notably, disappointingly, often outside of Los Angeles--toward Mitchell Kehe, Harry Davies, Enzo Shalom, Micheala Eichwald, Magnus Peterson Horner. Signs of life are in easier reach if I let myself count Cosima von Bonin and Jutta Koether, but do I? I feel admiration, but not quite enough closeness, to feel bolstered by what I see as good in them.

But here is the real "fiction" to my paintings (such as I conceive them) ("real": As though its any different from the "other" fiction, let alone anything "good" by comparison to it, let alone anything positively good). It's the way I stage little progressions, developments, iterations, zoomings-in and doublings-back for Ludovic Nemo, and thereby "fict" his autobiography (in fabricating what I am calling his autobiography). I mean the way in which I think, in countless passes and overpasses, of the "first room" in this Longstreth-Hetzler model, pacing back and forth over it until it accrues the patina I'm waiting for (the patina which alone gives me the permission to sign off on it, patina the sole gatekeeper of quality, but this is a digression). And even more when I talk over and over again about rooms beyond (and rooms beyond rooms beyond) this "first room," relying constantly upon this glimpses around the corners around the corner to ever-so-gradually gain more body for the paintings in the first room itself and, perhaps even more functionally importantly, to gain more confidence for the eventual fruitfulness (or the fructive eventuality, which, like aura or presence or aliveness in Graw's reading, is actually a quality which can inhere in paintings themselves, and which is the quality upon whose presence in this first room's paintings everything depends) of the ones ("ones" as though more than one painting could ever be painted at once) at hand.

Patina, modulation, pacing, exquisitely determined facture: It is only by doubling the author that these paintings become more than what they are, only thereby that they become paintings, only thereby attain the requisite aliveness. It all depends on the doubling of the authorship, the same that Duchamp effected with the readymade, the same that Hantai effected when he acknowledged the agency of the canvas itself and made the canvas paint the pattern (the figure, the gestalt, the painting), the same double-agent authorship of any baker and--I add this new one--any kidney stone (really a perfect image, with its patina and its crystallinity and its excrescency). And so I insist, it is not just I but also Ludovic Nemo who made these paintings (and it is not just Ludovic but also Nemo, and Ludovic Nemo is not just my doppelganger but also my new invention, and he is not just a new invention but also a century-old invention, and he is not just an invention but also a historical readymade, and even more particularly he is not just my double but also Bernard's double, and so forth). For these paintings it's necessary that the doubling be fractal--or, more precisely and less kitschily, inductive--or else the structure collapses back into simplicity.

In grasping too tightly onto my desire to be Teste-systematic, Teste-precise, Teste-simple, Teste-avowable, maybe I've gone up a creek. Take this story then. Last night I gasped, felt indicted, when I read Michaela Eichwald's reposting (on her blog Uhutrust, in automatic

translation) of the following fragment of Sean Tatol's post on Francis Picabia and Rosemarie Trockel: "No artist knows precisely what they're doing because artistic decisions are imprecise and instinctual, driven by a prelinguistic impulse that's present in all but the laziest and most cynically instrumentalized artworks." I, the laziest and most cynically instrumentalized! But I don't think so, really, because the prelinguistic comes through, wriggles through, really, bit by bit, in proceeding through the making of the paintings pass by pass, in the manner of patination (or ironing, or the transformation du boulanger, or the marche du crabe). And anyway the artist who knows precisely what he's doing--in this case, my bodily self after I and my fictional double have undecidably-collaboratively worked the paintings into figmental reality beforehand--is not really the whole story, and is not quite perfectly half of it either. Of course bullshit can be called right here, but that call itself is well within the scope of the little game I'm bearing forth here. Oh, I feel giddy, I feel like Jack Bankowsky talking about Krebber, I feel like Joshua Landy talking about Mallarmé. But no exclamation point on the preceding sentence, for two reasons: I lose everything if I pop this almost-irony into irony, for one, and for another it's all still just too poignant, in both cases because it's still just me talking about myself in terms that are not yet real, in shifter-terms that are still hanging, floating, having yet no real object-referent. Do the terms survive the making of the paintings?

The making of the paintings! For the first time I have canvases--No, I have bars. To have a stack of paintings! This skeletal stack is the closest I've ever come and I'm positively elated. And besides I quite like them, these little things I built, I like their homely little joints and their sharpness and their thinness (I recall Jack Bankowsky: "wafer-thin" he called his canvases in 2015), I like their dimensions sourced from a little group of Strau's tin paintings, I like that completely delightfully shallow act of lifting, I like the fact that I'm going to do it again, if I can squirrel some longer pieces of wood, with the very same Krebber paintings Jack was talking about ("almost (this is important!) same-size canvases"), and my little group will be as many as I want at 200 x 150.2 cm and one more (sealing the group) at 220 x 169.9 cm. A little stack of paintings, and this is what it's all about, and my stack has in it no paintings, and this is what it's all about.

Who in Los Angeles has a stomach for joke-modernism now? The only galleries scrappy enough for anything as self-consciously failure-bound as this are too laser-focused on their own hopelessly idiosyncratic vision of scrappiness that I have nothing to contribute to. And just here is the problem of address, of community, of reference, which Krebber bumped into at the precise moment when he painted his blog paintings. No, I don't think that "networks" is the answer for this (long-historied)

problem. Not that it's signed and sealed, but I really do believe, in its place, in my idea of narrative, of fiction. It's essentially Mallarmé's own idea, the same fiction that was presented so clearly in his "Autre éventail (pour Mlle. Mallarmé)"; in my paintings just as in his poems, everything depends on the ability of work itself to provide all the requisite ingredients, the poems to form (didactic? Educational? Only qualifiedly) their own audience, the paintings to smuggle in all their own relevant background. And so I start with duck fat and the Lipp floor, and all the music inheres in the development.

Certain things stick and cause me recurrent discomfort. For at least a year humor is one of them. I always feel self-conscious that everything I touch is drained of humor, whereas everything that works seems in some way animated by humor; that's obvious in Strau and Krebber, but it's also what separates Grotjahn from Ruby, and it's also the golden thread along which are also strung von Bonin and Polke and Kippenberger and Broodthaers and Picabia and Duchamp and even Manet when at the pinnacle of his dandy-consciousness he painted the lion-hunter (no one knows it; it's in São Paulo).

On plaid I have yet more thoughts. I think the way it can work for me is by first carrying forth the armatures into such an expansive and intricate dazzle that it is no surprise when at large scale they can even give an effect of plaid--and when they do so there is perceptible a wink to Krebber and to Trockel and to Polke (or, to Krebber's performatively-failing repetition of Polke and Trockel); because of the state of overcoding, I would destroy the wink by overtly including a readymade plaid textile as a primary component of a painting's composition as that painting's support--and yet I still need to sensitize the reference, and so I will do so by making a painting on a readymade plaid support but only on condition that the entire face be primed so that the plaid is present only in an up-close profile view, present only on a plane as rarefied as the one Sarah Rapson always works on: Only thus can the wink really be a wink, that is, only thus can it really have the requisite inframincité (every wink must be lighter than air; my paintings, because of the way their doubling fiction is necessarily constructed and poised, can only succeed if they retain this perpetual vanishing flicker).

Well then. One in the afternoon and I've done nothing but typewrite.

Three hours of putzing around later, neither leaving the room nor heating up skin glue on the stove nor even thinking about my "rooms," here's one more thing I was going to say.

It's nice for Krebber and Strau that they can use a working manner of waiting with a completely blank "beginner's mind" until the very last moment before a show, then throwing it all together under time pressure. But this is utterly unavailable to me because you can't get a show scheduled without having had one in the first place. Nor can I use Cosima von Bonin's strategy (bartend at the Kippenberger Trockel & co. club, and tell everyone to start referring to you as "the artist Cosima von Bonin"); another important thing about me (to be noted right off the bat in the account of my "case study") is that I have no art friends

(barely have anyone at all with whom to indulge my effervescent love of beer. I'm wearing my "HARP LAGER" shirt today, for example, and have not laid eyes on a living soul since Bella went out the door for work).

This is not by way of complaint, but rather to render more specific and particular the problem whose address my case study is to be. It's actually a more interesting problem than either Krebber's or von Bonin's, in my opinion. Has more to do with everyone.

This is where the self-contained aspect of the fiction comes in, the Mallarméan way of smuggling all the necessary cargo into the work itself. The much-doubted dream of providing all the equipment for its own reading. A horizon perhaps not to be grasped but at least to be approached a step or two closer than the current benchmarks.

On dandyism and freedom and the utopian kernel that is to be learned from Cologne and tried again:

From John Kelsey, "Cosima von Bonin" (ca. 2008):

"Some say that what keeps von Bonin's story interesting is precisely the fact that she is not and never has been a real artist, so every move she makes risks betraying her original (creative) imposture."

"All her themes—the self-historicizing of a community that both includes and excludes, indoctrination and discipline, role-playing and rank, the performance of success and failure, etc."

"The local history that includes von Bonin is also the story of an art world performing itself with a vengeance, and because of the extent to which her works remain embedded in a collective reappropriation of context via the ruses of fiction."

"Like the twin hull of the catamaran and the set's divided rooms, the "two positions" in the work's title might signal von Bonin's strategically ambivalent relationship to the programmed trajectory of an artist's career. She is still part nonartist."

"Even though the collective and critical ethic of '90s Cologne is now performed as an ironically romanticized and melancholic ritual—part fashion show, part music video, and part training camp—it persists nonetheless, acting out the hope of surviving its own perversion in the present."

"In "The Non-productive Attitude," a text written on the occasion of the group exhibition "Make Your Own Life: Artists In and Out of Cologne" (which was organized by Bennett Simpson at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, in 2006 and included von Bonin), Josef Strau writes of the uneasy "fusion of glam and politics" in a context where critical strategies were often inflected by ambition and envy."

So, from Strau, "The Non-productive attitude":

"It was maybe a kind of transformed fetishism attitude to live the social life of an artist without actually producing any art, or at least without presenting any art. On the one hand, the motives of this attitude could have been simple fear of representation; but on the other, they could have announced a desire to practice in a radical consequence what many theories suggested by the death an author-or producer-subjectivity. Certainly this pose of anti-production in the period of the late eighties, which for sure was already inspiring nineties art fashion,

was a self-transforming attitude— even as its strong background of theoretical and radicalist conceptual art considerations were criticized by some as a bourgeois attitude of well-fed men. The substitution of the artist-as-producer with the sheer behavior of the artist-bohemian was a reaction to the work values of the eighties and necessitated a very dense social field in which to act out its partly theatrical impulse.”

“When I moved there in the mid- to late eighties, I was very quickly assured by my first impressions that at least some parts of Cologne would allow me some time to survive and to become an artist who did not actually produce anything, did not have much to show and did not even feel the need to fulfill social life in any exciting way. There was a new necessity to practice a separation between the meaning of the artist's social participation and the representation of his production, in order to dissolve its old organic unity by creating another kind of social recognition— and in the best case to unnerve the repressive demands for legitimation.”

“In short, the popularity of anti-productive attitudes in Cologne was maybe a result of some iconoclastic tendency, the sympathy for an attitude which substitutes image qualities with narrative impulse. In the best years the non-productive artist got great recognition if he substituted his work for a good personal narrative. He could be a kind of island in the main art world, while securing continuity with the tradition of anti-visual heresies.”

“Most of the time [at Friesenwall] we pretended to show "models" for a space instead of actual work within the space.”

15 February 2026

I am dreaming of the biggest paintings I will ever make, not comically big like the Norton Simon's Frankenthaler or today's megagallery slop, but quite large paintings nevertheless; and I am dreaming of these things, maybe measuring seven feet tall by eleven wide, say, as exerting an emptiness as their chief quality. An emptiness whole-made, of course, made necessary by the painting's intricate (even while achingly minimal) inherent structure, and redeemed in the very same way in which any manifestation of contingency is redeemed (in Mallarmé's poetics). Morris Louis's curtains strove for the kind of exultant emptiness I'm speaking of, but they didn't get as close to transcendence as, say, certain much smaller paintings by Michael Krebber. On this particular score, both Hantai and Matisse do not quite make sense at this scale, do not quite connect with what I am trying to speak into existence. A monumental painting is something different from a tableau. The Barnes mural, the CAPC unstretched canvases, the Tabulas lilas laid unstretched on the ground: These leave me to some extent unsatisfied, in the manner in which they retain, now in a vestigial mode, the organs which had given consummate realization to the Matissean full-to-bursting aliveness of active, tensed expansion.

17 February 2026

Paul Sietsema happened to sit down in the seat directly next to mine in the ArtCenter talk (the panel on art writing). Completely unprompted, he told me he'd love to see my work. I demurred. He gave me his email for the occasion of my eventual change of heart: paulsietsema@gmail.com.

18 February 2026

Material for an exhibition, a first one, "the first room," The Autobiography of Ludovic Nemo or The Autobiography of Ludovic Nemo, I (I like the double entendre but I don't think it's legible enough) or The Autobiography of Ludovic Nemo, vol. I (I don't like how it sounds like a movie or a video game).

Idea about drawings in 2 or three groups: First, a vertical column of drawings, like to suggest progressive development, like to provide a transparent window into the palingenesis of the armature-form which is repeated in every painting; these are to be framed with clear PVC, in the manner of Julia Yerger's drawings at Château Shatto (which--maddening!--are not photographed in these frames in the gallery's documentation, nor did I happen to take pictures of them myself), in the following order from Left to Right or from Bottom to Top:

Then, separately, a bundle of drawings off to the side, the drawings I made of Fennec at the same time that I was coming up with the armature; these are to be framed and hung individually, like as-drawings, I don't know how specifically; like to suggest sincerity, like to suggest a certain range of means by triangulating from a distant second point.

There persists a question: Whether or not to include the following drawings, as a third group, indicating (but is this even legible?) a notion of formalization (armature-development) of the baby "as" the "little guys."

Collectively these two sets of drawings stage the fable of where the paintings come from; this is perhaps extraneous or redundant or too much—this perhaps violates the “inframince” operating principle—but right now I have the feeling that to do less would be too little.

And then there are the paintings, and that’s it. But not quite: There’s the “press release,” and maybe there’s something else besides, some little trinket or poster or postcard or invitation?

The “press release”:

I. Fable

i) Some quote pertaining to “Fable” from Novalis (the psychedelically allegorical section of Heinrich von Ofterdingen) “‘Grant me,’ said the Moon, ‘the Kingdom of the Fates, whose wondrous mansions have arisen from the earth, even in the court of the palace. I will delight you therein with spectacles, in which the little Fable will assist me.’ / ... Fable and history sustain to each other the most intimate relations, through paths the most intricate, and disguises the most extraordinary.” Novalis, Heinrich von Ofterdingen [Perhaps I append “(Red herring)” at the end of this quotation]

ii) Quote from Marc Kokopeli’s press statement from Tales of the veil (to overshoot a second time, in an opposite direction; these first two are red herrings, then): “These Post-Baroque stylings inform the exhibition with questions about the circularity of references to the fable of becoming an artist.” Mark Kokopeli, “Tales of the Veil” [Perhaps I append “(Red herring)” at the end of this quotation, too]

iii) Something from Puberty in painting (do I cringe and collapse? Do I lose everything in overstating reference, saying too much?): “... one knows that everyone has a different understanding of this concept [that of painting], and that even this very understanding is duplicated and movable within its own parameters. ... If I call all this a stage situation, then the ghosts won’t necessarily have to scare me anymore. I will have to become active though.” Michael Krebber, “Puberty in Painting” [Perhaps I do not append “(Red herring)” at the end of this quotation; I love the charge that its absence inaugurates, coinciding perfectly with the Krebber invocation; it is so hilarious as to even be glamorous, to me.]

II. Topos (or: II. Theme)

(So, what I am doing is laying out the conditions for fiction, roughly) (Stated as a sort of “scénario”: in one or two sentences, generate the premise of the duck fat and the re-stretching, or more specifically the specific supplement which the armature-etiology afforded by the “revelatory sketches” does not already account for. I’m talking about the parquet or tile at Lipp, the horse dealers, and so on, the fixation attributed to Ludovic which compels the repetition.

III. Mechanism (or, perhaps better, “III. Motion”) (options declined for their too-much valence: kinesis, dynamism, vibration, activation,

animation, electrification, hocus pocus, expansion, elaboration, development, induction)
Repetition, oscillation, vibration; variation, conjugation, bifurcation, recombination; revisitation, counterpoint, zoom-in, capitulation, stasis, bloom, apotheosis; digestion, fermentation, lamination, accumulation, compost; clearing, breath, refreshing, fiction.

Footer: Three "artist bio" sections, playing with the common typesetting practice of having slightly wider margins for the text body (the press release text) than for the footer (the artist bio / CV), as not quite seen here:

So, in my case, slightly wider than the body, an artist bio for Ludovic Nemo, with my birth date; then, immediately below with the same typesetting, another almost exactly repeated artist bio for Ludovic Nemo, with Bernard's LN's birth date / CV; then a third one, for myself, with slightly narrower margins (so a footer to the footer, slightly wider still), almost exactly matching the first Ludovic Nemo's bio, but with my name. As follows:

... Repetition, oscillation, vibration; variation, conjugation, bifurcation, recombination; revisitation, counterpoint, zoom-in, capitulation, stasis, bloom, apotheosis; digestion, fermentation, lamination, accumulation, compost; clearing, breath, refreshing, fiction.
Ludovic Nemo (b. 2001, Arlington, Texas, United States) lives and works in Los Angeles. He has had no one-person exhibitions. His work has not been included in any group shows.
Ludovic Nemo (b. 1868, Sint-Martens-Latem, East Flanders, Kingdom of Belgium) ostensibly lives and works in Paris. His work has only been included in the Volpini Exhibition, held at the Café des Arts on the occasion of the 1889 Exposition universelle.
Tom Worth (b. 2001, Arlington, Texas, United States) lives and works in Los Angeles. He has had no one-person exhibitions. His work has not been included in any group shows.

It is already past the hour at which I was to drive to the Getty to consult the oracles in the GRI (artist books of Krebber Strau Koether von Bonin and whomever I forgot).

The ending of a short-ish Yve-Alain Bois Artforum article on Matisse's sculpture:

"We have now arrived at the true juncture where Matisse's sculpture and painting meet— or rather, where the parallelism to which the artist alluded resides. This has nothing to do with the appearance of his sculptures in his paintings or the game of identifying shared figures and poses among them. Instead, the common goal of his best work in both domains is, to my mind, that of deflecting cognition, of preventing us from forming any kind of Gestaltist synthesis. I've written extensively on this aspect of Matisse's painting, so I shall be synoptic here. Between *Le Bonheur de Vivre* and his (failed) encounter with Cubism in 1913-16, Matisse elaborates two pictorial strategies to derail our gaze, to make us lost: either excess of color saturation and size, or "decorative" excess that compels us to look at everything at once, so that we are forced to rely on our peripheral vision and lose control over the field of the canvas. Neither kind of excess is involved in Matisse's sculpture. However, the will to blind us remains—blinding in the sense of preventing us from mastering the work we behold, from having a clear and consistent view of it as something we can ever fully grasp."

I get the sense--but maybe only halfway--that he is trying to turn Matisse into a Picasso or a Picabia, in the same way he tried to do that to Mondrian. Namely that he is trying to make Matisse and Mondrian out to have subconsciously, even against their every intention, carried out the same inexorable process that Picasso and Picabia zealously embraced: Total destruction, proceeding dialectically and therefore ever more fully all the length of their career. I've also felt, for years, that the Picasso-Picabia project of destruction is an admirable process, lending a sense of the sublime which is in that way properly aesthetic, but that it is somehow off to the side of the endeavor that I more closely identify with. The latter is the making of good paintings, and Matisse and Mondrian are its twin chief patron saints (I said as much ca. nine months ago, when last summer I consciously elevated them to the status of dual exemplars for my craft, alongside whom there can be no other so great; so I said, and so the system collapsed, slowly and then completely and then into the winter with dying rattles).

Now I don't see these projects as two opposite sides of a coin anymore. I think all good art involves negation to some extent. And I don't think that the delectation of the most destructive Picabia is categorically different from that of the most classically balanced and harmonious Matisse. The field is more complicated than either of those two mutually-exclusive conceptions yet comprehended.

19 February 2026

I'm absolutely floored by having taken Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit* from the top for the first time. I'll try to take several passes at what I'm trying delicately to hold in my head right now.

First, that it's just a sense, just the barest and most possible sense: I've only been through the preface, and not quite all of it. But I've found something important already.

Second, it's that I had delicious peanut sesame noodles, with half a bottle of Beaujolais, and then I felt capable of such a beautiful state of mind. Then I knew that I wanted a cigarette, but I didn't know what I wanted to turn this mind upon. Failing to convince Bella to join me for a walk, I arrived at this choice, mostly because I began last night, Ash Wednesday, to systematically work through Gaston Fessard's Dialectic of the spiritual exercises.

The third is that Hantai's pliage makes sense in a completely new way, which is also the same way, but more fully.

What I feel most strongly is this: That I find in Hegel the nearest neighbor--more near than Heidegger's Being and Time, in which I also found 2 or 3 years ago what was at that time the nearest neighbor I'd found to what I'm really up to in hoping for anything to come out of my turning to painting. What I'm talking about is what I've talked about previously in terms of wanting to lay out more clearly, more legibly, more followably, more reproducibly, more knowably, more avowably, more basically and more authentically than ever before, a way of looking, a way of thinking, a way of painting. Conceiving my ambition in these terms has been, for a while, since at least 2023, the only way I've been able to think of my project--a bare conviction--as something of any use for anyone, anyone other than myself and even including myself. (With all that is available to everyone now, only the superlative that I'm trying to articulate by means of these several approximate superlatives is the one that lends my painting, and most of all my approach toward it (an approach that I have tried at every stage to realize as fully and as truly as ever I could) any use at all, any quality at all. Perhaps at various points in the past I have very poorly tried to say what I mean here by using phrases such as "from first principles" or "from square one" or simply by pointing to Heidegger or to Rilke or even to Descartes. I could just as usefully have pointed to an early Wittgenstein, and given a listener just as much cause to doubt. What I am finding here in Hegel is something which much more closely reflects what I mean. It's not a matter of first principles, of axioms and their faithful extrapolation or unfolding; it's not a matter of axioms, and never could have been, and I've known that for long, since the solidity of axioms dissolved for me twelve years ago. Instead, and this is what I get from Hegel from the very first sentences (and what I thought was original to Heidegger), it's a matter of closely examining, while putting into play a manner of proceeding, a delicate system of such a manner, which incorporates the proceeding as well as the looking, and the saying, and even the eventual legibility thereof. It's easy to size this up as an intractable ambition: Countless unsuccessful realizations thereof can immediately be ideated, and no matter how long Hegel indulged his own realization's writing out, any shortcoming of clarity anywhere in his corpus can lend validity to all of these refutations. Like anyone else, I know this. But this is still the type of thing that I want more than anything else to try, because it's not about making something that can't be refuted. It's about making something that can be used.

And as a single footnote to add, from among countless possible ones, I only point out that this text is positively littered with observations sharp enough to inspire a heuristic kind of confidence in its author's perceptivity, faithfulness, truth to life, acuity, ingenuity, even humility of a sort of perverse kind, analogous in all this to no one so much as to Cézanne (although, at times, these acuties, prodigious unto

the point of propheticism (and herein I see why so many times it's been said that modernity starts in Hegel's vision, over-generous though this has always sounded), make me think rather of Matisse, Matisse even more than Cézanne, Matisse's color, Matisse's mind-cracking, his prayerfulness, his openness toward color.

Just one more footnote. I was thinking often of pliage, thinking, though this is probably not the order in which it happened, of Hantaï turning toward The phenomenology of spirit after having encountered Fessard's Hegelian Ignatius, and then finding, in 1959, in Hegel's astounding figurations of unfolding, the impetus for a new art that would change everything. And I thought--miserable thought, in that it cheapens everything that an étude is, an étude like the green one at the end of my slideshow or the monumental blue one in Orleans, in its perfect oneness and economy, its gesture in and as the painting, and vice versa, to idly modernismicize. At risk of cheapening this, I still record this second footnote: I thought of a new pliage, in which the unstretched canvas is folded, but the left and right edges are stretched and tacked to a loose, straight bar, while the rest of the loose canvas. is crumpled uniformly and then covered in paint (as in an étude) (perhaps in this case it would be white paint, and/or a sort of brownish caput mortuum, laid along the stretched, lateral, straight edges). And, in the stretching of this painting, most crucially, most newly, is the transitions that make themselves clear between the straight lateral edges and the central allover. This would be something even closer to Hegel than the pliage that I've come to know is. But I redeem my cheapening with the following observation, which immediately followed on the above idea: That this is precisely what the Catamurons have been doing all along, and I've just never noticed it, and this is why I've never really looked at them, not how I should have The Catamurons and even some Mariales, maybe even all of them, for all I know: Anywhere that the allover takes a specific, and not synecdochal, stance toward (that is, realization of) the bound, the border, the bar, the edge, the limit, the origin, the horizon, the beginning, the end.

bottom